UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.198/1993/7
10 March 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
Fifteenth session
10-28 May 1993

SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

Integration of United Nations information centres with other United Nations offices, while maintaining the functional autonomy of the United Nations information centres

Report of the Secretary-General

Introduction

1. In paragraph 6 of resolution 47/73 B of 14 December 1992, the General Assembly called upon the Secretary-General "to submit a detailed and comprehensive report on his plan of integrating United Nations information centres with other United Nations offices, while maintaining the functional autonomy of the United Nations information centres and emphasizing that they should be fully operational, as provided for in relevant resolutions, to the Committee on Information at its fifteenth session".

2. The present report is submitted to the Committee on Information in response to paragraph 6 of resolution 47/73 B.

Secretary-General's decision

3. In the interest of improved productivity and economies of scale, as well as presenting a unified United Nations image, the Secretary-General decided in March 1992 that, wherever feasible, the operations of United Nations information centres should be integrated with those of UNDP field offices.

4. On 3 April 1992, the Department of Public Information convened the first meeting of the Working Group on the integration project, comprising representatives of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, UNDP, the Department of Public Information, the Department of Administration and Management, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of Human Resources

Management and the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Finance. The Working Group agreed that the 1990 Agreement between UNDP and the Department of Public Information on cooperation in the field would form the basis on which to build further cooperation. It also identified other measures necessary to the integration.

5. The integration effort thus also reflects the provision of paragraph 2 (c) of resolution 47/73 B in which the General Assembly calls upon the Secretary-General to ensure that the Department of Public Information "continues its efforts at promoting an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations system among the peoples of the world and at strengthening the positive image of the system as a whole".

Purposes and objectives

6. The objectives of the integration exercise are to present a unified United Nations image in the field, to enhance information activities in all areas, including development issues, and to achieve all possible economies through sharing of common services (such as telecommunication and computer facilities and equipment; reference library services; administrative, secretarial and other staffing services; maintenance of premises and dissemination of public information).

7. The focus of the exercise at this stage are 18 information centres in locations where the UNDP Resident Representative serves concurrently as a full-time centre Director. These are: Algiers, Ankara, Antananarivo, Asuncion, Bucharest, Cairo, Colombo, Kabul, Kathmandu, Kinshasa, La Paz, Lome, Managua, Maseru, Monrovia, Panama City, San Salvador and Yangon.

8. In August 1992, joint letters were sent to the 18 officials in the field outlining policies and guidelines for the integrated operation.

9. Specifically, the integrated information centres continue to maintain their functional autonomy, with UNDP resident representatives who serve as centre Directors continuing to report to the Department of Public Information on every aspect of the work, administration, budget and staffing of those information centres, all of which will remain independent of those of UNDP. Further, while sharing of resources is encouraged, the accounts and equipment of the information centres and of UNDP field offices in the same location will continue to be clearly segregated for financial reporting and control.

10. The UNDP resident representatives in these cases have a dual responsibility of managing both the UNDP work and the work of the Department of Public Information. The Department, therefore, provides all UNDP resident representatives with a thorough briefing on administrative, financial and personnel procedures of the United Nations Secretariat through exchange of correspondence, as well as though personal briefings whenever a relevant UNDP official visits Headquarters.

11. The 18 UNDP resident representatives have been asked to examine the possibility of relevant centre staff members attending local UNDP training sessions and seminars to increase their understanding of development issues.

12. In addition to the financial benefits, the integration of the offices is expected to have other qualitative benefits arising from closer interaction and increased cooperation. For instance, it has been recommended that a schedule of events for the year be established, identifying priority themes, selecting target audiences, coordinating promotional efforts and seeking the cooperation of local institutions and organizations.

13. These offices have been requested to strive to project a unified United Nations image and to present one voice in the field. They have been requested to identify one member of the information staff of the office to serve as the focal point in dealings with national institutions and organizations.

14. For official visits of the Secretary-General and senior officials of the Organization, a single programme will be developed, ensuring cooperation with other offices of the United Nations system.

15. In cases where the information centre is receiving host government support in cash and/or in kind, including rent-free premises, the UNDP resident representative has been instructed to ensure continuation of such support. In cases where there is no host government support, the officials concerned have been requested to seek it.

16. Most of the integrated information centres share common office premises with UNDP. Where the centre has separate premises, whether provided by the host Government or rented by the Department, the UNDP resident representative has been requested to explore the feasibility of common premises at a future date. At present, only the information centres in Cairo, Kinshasa, Lome, Managua, Maseru and Panama City remain at separate locations from those of local UNDP offices.

Evaluation of integration

17. It has been agreed that the experience with integration will be evaluated after a trial period of one year, during which time the terms of integration will be refined through exchanges between the field offices and Headquarters. The findings will be communicated to all field offices of the Department of Public Information and of UNDP.

18. In the meantime, the Department's and UNDP officials at Headquarters continue to hold regular meetings to review the integration project and ensure maximum collaboration between the two field offices.